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Steering Toward a More Capable Acquisition Workforce

Rene' Thomas-Rizzo

The goal of the Department of the Navy's Director of Acquisition Career Management (DACM) office is to provide the Navy with the highest quality acquisition workforce possible. "Having the right people, in the right job, at the right time will translate to effective and efficient execution, delivering the finest warfighting capability in the world at an affordable price," said James Thomsen, principal civilian deputy, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition (ASN[RD&A]).

In this dangerous world, the Navy's acquisition workforce must become more capable in providing our service-members the proper tools to do their job. The DACM office has been charged with oversight of growing the acquisition workforce and with revitalization of the force, to include improved training, focused recruiting, and deliberate management of career pipelines. We aim to build a stronger acquisition workforce, beginning with the current acquisition team, by offering continuous learning opportunities, tuition assistance, and clear advancement paths. We are initiating new recruiting techniques, searching for the best and brightest from top-ranked universities to build a stronger science and engineering foundation. We are also getting the word out to potential new hires that the Navy acquisition workforce is a great place to build a career. Although we have set the bar high, we are convinced that our goal to create a highly professional and sustainable acquisition workforce is attainable.

The Navy Acquisition Workforce Strategic Plan

In 2009, the acquisition workforce represented 8 percent of the Navy's total military and civilian workforce, yet it was responsible for executing nearly 45 percent of the Navy's total obligation authority. That same year, the President issued a memorandum calling for a stronger, more capable federal acquisition workforce. Following the President's announcement, the Secretary of Defense released his plan to rebalance the department's workforce, including the in-sourcing of 10,000 acquisition positions department-wide. Armed with the Navy's *Total Force Vision for the 21st Century* and the Secretary of Defense's 2010 *DoD Strategic Human Capital Plan Update: The Defense Acquisition Workforce*, we in the DACM office set off to build a strategic plan to act on the President's and the Secretary of Defense's guidance.

We established six pillars of action:

- Rebalance the Navy's acquisition workforce
- Integrate acquisition workforce requirements into the Navy's annual planning, programming, budgeting, and execution system
- Reinforce the science and engineering foundation
- Improve program management and acquisition business skills pipelines
- Return to deliberate flag officer/senior executive service member acquisition community management
- Plan acquisition workforce sustainment.

Those six pillars, along with the DoD human capital initiative, led us to use analytical forecasting to optimize recruitment, retention, and hiring while establishing a strong management process to align billets, qualified people, and competencies. That ensures we invest in the right people, considering both the Navy's acquisition workforce needs as well as the individual's needs.

Rebalancing the Acquisition Workforce

The first call to action from the Secretary of Defense was to reduce our reliance on out-sourcing and contractor support services, which aligns with the first pillar in our strategic plan: rebalance the Navy's acquisition workforce. As such, the Navy DACM office has focused on rebuilding our bench strength in specific competencies and career fields. We are instituting initiatives to rebalance the current acquisition workforce and set objectives to increase the numbers of acquisition workforce government civilians based upon core technical and business functions and credible demand signals. Main areas of focus include execution of the acquisition workforce growth plan over the Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP), to include appropriate in-sourcing of civilian personnel and hiring 1,590 civilians using the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act Section 852 defense acquisition workforce development funds. We also aim to establish a comprehensive, data-driven acquisition workforce analysis and decision-making capability through total force analytical models, leveraging Office of Naval Operations (Manpower and Personnel) and Marine Corps modeling.

We are working with our "Big 6" acquisition commands to determine acquisition workforce requirements and demand signals, and we are also implementing and encouraging new growth in the workforce using initiatives like in-sourcing and Section 852 funds. Currently, we are on target for our in-sourcing goal, with 759 acquisition workforce employees in-sourced to the acquisition workforce since we started at the beginning of fiscal year 2010, with plans for a total in-sourcing goal of 3,500 acquisition positions over the next 5 years.

The Naval Acquisition Intern Program was established to recruit high-potential people into the acquisition workforce. The program involves hiring paid, full-time individuals for all career fields. In 2010, we saw the largest intern class in program history, with more than 1,500 interns to date—the highest number in the 20 years of the program's existence. Additionally, the annual Intern Conference, held in Washington, D.C., was attended by more than 500 people. In addition to having more talent and volume than previous years, the 2010 intern class was also the most racially and ethnically diverse to date. This class was divided 60:40 male to female, with ages ranging from 22 to over 41 years old. About 16 percent were veterans, comprising various career fields and commands. Nearly 27 percent of the interns were brought in under the Section 852 funding, which represents the influx of the new way to build the acquisition workforce, and that percentage will continue to increase over the next few years.

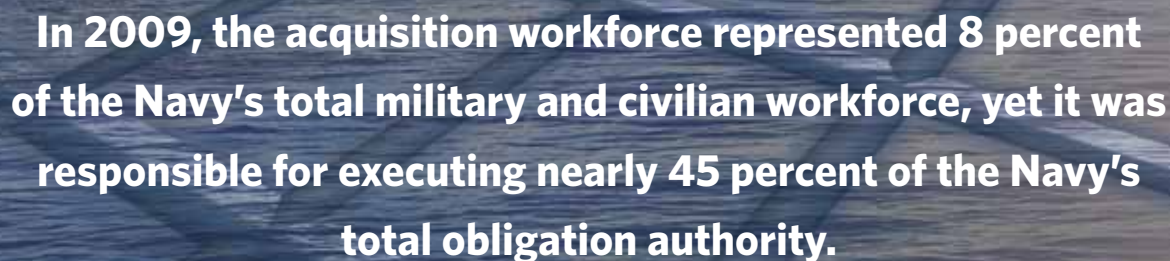
The Section 852 initiative has been key to finding quality new hires. It has allowed us to hire more than just intern-level positions, though, as we can offer journeyman-level opportunities through the Navy Associates Program. This successful effort has pulled highly talented engineers and program managers from the troubled auto industry in Detroit, and it has helped us expand the expert-level knowledge of our acquisition workforce.

Keeping Acquisition Workforce on the Radar

If we are to properly manage the Navy acquisition workforce, the DACM must have a voice in the program objective memorandum process. The Navy DACM is now a full participant in staffing requirements as submitted to the planning, programming, budgeting, and execution system process. The DACM's involvement in that system process ensures an informed investment is made in our future acquisition workforce. The DACM office monitors the quality of the workforce as well as its rightsizing. By staying in sync with the planning, programming, budgeting, and execution system process, the DACM office is providing meaningful input to the acquisition workforce investment and is able to monitor progress of the growth plan.

Strengthening Science and Engineering

Long gone are the days of simple warfare systems and unsophisticated enemies. As the battlespace becomes more complex, the acquisition workforce must follow suit in its understanding of the increasingly sophisticated weaponry and acquisition processes required to equip our forces properly.



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That is why it is so important to reinforce our science and engineering foundation.

The Department of the Navy has a longstanding tradition of in-house expertise in science and engineering. Over the past 15 years, the capacity of science and engineering expertise has reduced by nearly 47 percent, while the workload has gone up by 26 percent over the same period. As an inherent part of the Navy's strategic plan, we intend to restore science and engineering talent back to the Navy's acquisition workforce, allowing us to maintain a technological advantage and regain ownership of the technical-cost tradespace in our acquisition programs.

Thus far, the DACM has promoted and instituted initiatives to reinforce the science and engineering foundation that hires scientists and engineers at the Navy's Warfare Centers and the Naval Research Laboratory who have the expertise that the Navy needs to regain knowledge of the technical-cost tradespace of naval acquisition programs. These initiatives include:

- Increasing in-house technical domain expertise (networks, ships, missiles, sonar, etc.) and increasing systems engineering capacity by 14 percent over FYDP
- Re-starting Navy Laboratory/Center Coordinating Group as well as Navy systems engineering stakeholders groups to improve systems engineering competency
- Reinvesting in the Navy's science and engineering workforce by attracting, rewarding, and retaining the nation's most capable scientists and engineers
- Leveraging Navy science and technology community through Section 219 (fiscal year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act) and other approved methods to make immediate changes
- Investigating and improving current Navy policy regarding independent research and development partnerships with industry.

Our workforce must have the same level of technical, business, and leadership acumen as our industry partners who will be building the systems that the Navy and the Marine Corps will be operating at sea and in the battlespace.

Pipelines

The need is urgent, not only for quality of experience for acquisition assignments, but also for standards in the amount of time served in approved acquisition positions. We must have

qualified, certified, experienced, and technically competent people in our acquisition billets. The fourth pillar in the Navy's acquisition workforce strategic plan—to improve the program manager and acquisition business skills—is aimed at accomplishing that task.

To improve program manager and acquisition business skills, the DACM office established initiatives that will get the right people in the right jobs, at the right time with the right certification across all acquisition competencies. Initiatives include standardizing the slating process for ASN(RD&A), reviews of current qualification requirements and assessing the need for qualifying versus quantifying experience and knowledge, and implementing appropriate waiver policies for all acquisition workforce positions. Another important initiative spearheaded by the DACM office is the effort to drastically reduce seat cancellations in required courses and ensure candidates applying for key acquisition and leadership positions are meeting statutory training requirements in the allotted timeframe. We have taken a more proactive role in ensuring key acquisition leaders are taking the required executive-level training courses at the right phase in their careers as well as expanding curriculum availability to our future leaders filling critical acquisition-coded positions. The eventual goal is to have clearly developed career paths for all acquisition workforce competencies.

Under the direction of the ASN(RD&A), the DACM office manages a number of affiliations, partnerships, or cooperative agreements with educational and professional organizations in support of developing the Navy acquisition workforce. The University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Executive Education, LLC, previously delivered an initial pilot course in early 2010, "Navy Government-Industry Partnership Program," designed to develop a cadre of Navy acquisition and requirements professionals who understand the industry mindset, financial and decision-making processes, and incentives program. The pilot was so successful that acquisition leadership requested the course be continued semiannually in the spring and fall.

The Senior Leadership Pipeline

Our fifth pillar, deliberately managing senior acquisition billets, flows from the fourth pillar. Along with ensuring proper pipelines for those entering the workforce, it is paramount to have customized pipelines and hands-on career management for those in senior leadership positions. We must have members

of the acquisition workforce who are properly groomed for eventual community leadership positions. Our first step was to designate an acquisition community leader for military and civilian acquisition professionals. We have assigned the principal military deputy, ASN(RD&A), oversight responsibilities across the military acquisition workforce members, and the principal civilian deputy, ASN(RD&A), as the senior executive service acquisition community leader. We intend to establish an acquisition community management board of senior leadership to coordinate senior acquisition billets/assignments and to leverage the senior executive service talent management process. Members will be hand-selected by the ASN(RD&A) office to fill the senior leadership billets, codifying the practice of deliberate management of senior acquisition billets.

In addition to that senior leadership pipeline, we have endorsed the Corporate Leadership Program, which provides senior military members the opportunity for first-hand industry experience. We have secured the Navy two seats in that prestigious and growing program, and we will continue to offer our senior officers the opportunity to gain experience with industry partners through the exchange of invaluable workforce knowledge and skills. Companies and corporations across the gamut, from Boeing and Cisco to Sears and 3M, provide training in long-range planning, organizational and management innovation, and implementation of new information and other technologies. This initiative offers our senior leadership a balanced portfolio of training and expert testimony to lead and mentor the acquisition workforce of the future.

Planning for the Future is Key

The final pillar of our strategic plan, though perhaps the most obvious, relies heavily on the success of the previous five pillars. This pillar—the sustainment of the workforce—is a culmination of the DACM's acquisition workforce goals and relies on finding the right people, finding those people across all backgrounds, steering those people into the right career paths, and nurturing those individuals to become the leaders of the acquisition community of the future.

To plan acquisition workforce sustainment, the DACM office has established initiatives that use analytical forecasting to optimize acquisition workforce recruitment, retention and hiring, and to establish a strong management process to align billets, qualified people, and competencies. Those initiatives include identifying and prioritizing areas for acquisition workforce retention management and exploring strategies to improve retention. The DACM commissioned a study to build a predictive tool to help identify the attributes, qualifications, experience, training, and education that epitomizes the successful acquisition professional.

Along with providing the acquisition workforce membership with career paths and balance, it also provides leadership with awareness of gaps before they occur. Analytical forecasting allows us to do just that and facilitates our ability to maintain a stable, competent, and self-sustaining acquisition workforce.

Continued Learning Opportunities

We are using several different inducements to attract and retain a high-quality workforce. Along with tuition assistance, we rely heavily on the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) to ensure the workforce continually improves. The continuous learning program is an ongoing effort that enables individuals to stay current with all acquisition policies and procedures. DAWIA requires each acquisition workforce member to earn 80 continuous learning points over a 2-year period. The requirement is targeted toward keeping the community in touch and relevant as times and conditions change. The DACM office is looking into more and better ways to train the acquisition workforce, including Navy- and Marine Corps-tailored DAU courses that address Department of Navy-unique acquisition issues (for example, the newly established “Ships are Different” course).

Moving Toward Acquisition Excellence

The past year's efforts in the DACM office have focused on three cornerstones to success and sustainment: “Back to basics”; Navy acquisition workforce strategic plan; and execution of our acquisition workforce growth plan.

Back-to-basics efforts have focused on enhancing the professionalism of our acquisition workforce through maximizing DAWIA certification achieved and compliance with statutory requirements. In July 2010, the DACM established fiscal year 2011 DAWIA goals to track and measure progress in the acquisition workforce.

Publishing the first-ever Department of Navy acquisition workforce strategic plan, which lists the six most important pillars that undergird the acquisition workforce, is a significant accomplishment. Additionally, we have developed a plan of action and milestones by which we are monitoring execution and success of each of the pillars.

The DACM office is working with its major acquisition system commands to develop standard reporting metrics, and we meet quarterly to discuss and monitor progress and track against our growth plan. We are on target to meet the Navy commitment to the secretary of defense's initiative to grow/rebalance the acquisition workforce over the FYDP. Our Naval Acquisition Intern Program has been a major focal point, and one that has allowed for great success in raising the bar in professionalism in the acquisition credentials of the workforce.

Growing the acquisition workforce, converting core functions back to government, recruitment and retention of world-class engineers and scientists, improved pipeline planning, and deliberate and thoughtful leadership preparation all play a part in the Navy's pursuit of a more capable acquisition workforce.

Thomas-Rizzo is the Director, Acquisition Career Management (DACM), Department of the Navy. She is the Navy's focal point for management and development of the acquisition workforce. The author welcomes questions and comments, and can be reached at rene.thomas-rizzo@navy.mil.